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The Great Cities School Improvement Project among the culturally disadvantaged in Philadelphia attempted to fill the following needs: 1) intensive help in developing and improving communication skills, 2) experiences to extend and enrich cultural background, 3) participation in programs designed to encourage positive intergroup understandings, 4) encouragement to develop pride in themselves and their abilities, and 5) development of interest and support of the home. The way in which attempts have been made to meet these needs has varied among the eight schools involved (one junior high school and eight elementary schools). There has been an emphasis upon language arts instruction and cultural enrichment through after-school and Saturday field trips. Effort was made for the stimuli, participation, and repetitions of the learning process to be placed in a context relevant to the pupils. Resources for the program included a language arts laboratory within each school, language arts consultants, language laboratory teachers, school-community liason personnel, in-service training programs for teachers, specially devised curricula, and unique testing programs.

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SCHOOL REPORT: THE GREAT CITIES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IN PHILADELPHIA

Observed by Sophie Bloom, Howland School

The Philadelphia Project for children of limited background began in 1960 in one junior high school and three elementary schools. It was jointly financed by the Ford Foundation and the School District. In September, 1961, the Project expanded to include four additional elementary schools. Additional consultants were added at that time. As stated in their report, the project attempted to fill the following needs:

1. Intensive help in developing and improving communication skills.

2. Experiences to extend and enrich cultural background.

3. Participation in program designed to encourage positive intergroup understandings.

4. Encouragement to develop pride in themselves and their abilities.

5. Development of interest and support of the home.

The planning committee decided to concentrate on the area of language arts within the school, as the area of greatest need for the children in the project schools. Funds were allocated for language arts consultants for the project, a language laboratory teacher and language arts laboratory within each school, the purchase of additional instructional equipment and materials, and funds for opportunities for cultural and experiential enrichment. Community agents were hired as liaison personnel between school and community.

A strong in-service training program on a weekly basis, was instituted by the language arts consultants. The teachers were relieved of their classrooms to attend a workshop at which time the language arts laboratory teacher presented a literature program to their classes. The language arts laboratory teacher provides a summary of the movie the children have seen or the story they have heard, plus a story book for follow-up by each classroom teacher.

The language arts laboratory teacher in each school is responsible for helping inexperienced teachers become proficient in classroom management and instructional techniques. Many a teacher was saved by this beginning assistance.

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Each teacher was encou ged to ask for hel in any skill or procedure about which she felt unsure As a result of e llent relations with the consultant, this service is ed extensively.

The teachers are paid r an e ive a r-sch program which includes both enrichment an remedia . T are al paid for trips for enrichment on Saturday rnings. the mer, t project provided a workshop for which the t ers were d. brary b s were bought for each classroom and pr of art m vic for ea school. There has been progress in achi at, in th ea ce of t hildren and neighborhood, in school ho elations, in lf-image d aspiration level of the children.

USE OF GENERALIZATIONS IN I ING AND IMP TA ON OF E PROJECT

1. Contrary to the literature on the su the fi gs in Philadelphia are that by the sixth grade the a tic skills are lower than the reading and language skills. This incl both computation and problem solving. The boys and girls were 3 years ind in arithmetic as compared with 2-1/2 years in reading.

2. Achievement differences between boys and girls disappear by the third grade. Boys are a little slower at the beginning.

The emphasis in the eight schools varies. In some, it has been community development; in others, self image of the children. Language arts has been stressed in all; primarily listening, some speaking, reading skills, with a heavy stress on comprehension, and writing skills. There has been emphasis on enrichment for all, by means of trips on Saturday, an effective literature program for all the children, and special enrichment classes for the advanced students from second grade on up. Special help is given to the lowest achieving group, called the non-verbals.

A survey was made the first year of the study which described the gaps in verbal ability, conceptual ability, and ability to discriminate colors. The findings showed that the children were low in visual-motor development as well as auditory-oral. They need training in hand-eye coordination and small muscle coordination, as well as in language perception and conceptual development.

One of the basic assumptions of the program is that the children come with very limited experiential background. The program attempts to raise the achievement of the lowest group, called the non-verbals, and at the same time, raise the achievement and aspiration level of the highest group through enrichment.

The major emphasis of the whole project has been curricular -- much material has been selected and collected, and much original material has been devised in the language arts area. The organization within the school has been very supportive of the teacher especially the new teacher through

the in-service program. As has been mentioned, upon request, the language arts consultants or language arts laboratory teacher come into the classroom for demonstrations.

The testing program in reading is unique. No standardized test is used. The correlation between the IRI and the scores on the standardized reading test is very high, however, the IRI is more diagnostic. The Informal Reading Inventory devised by Betts is administered to six children at a time. They are tested orally and individually on skills and comprehension. On the basis of this test, the children are then grouped according to achievement level for reading. Achievement is in terms of book level with individual appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.

Evaluation work is in process now as the project draws to a close. In one school about 1/3 of the children are now achieving at grade level or higher. When the project started less than 1 percent were at this level.

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

CUE (Stimulus)

The devising of specific materials, with all the details spelled out, has done much to make the cues very meaningful. In the low verbal class, the teacher proceeded at an exceedingly slow pace, using such very limited goals that each child was succeeding. The teacher herself was amazed at the progress of the children, because the prognosis had been so poor. The new materials devised in writing, spelling, and reading, used a variety of sensory pathways, the auditory, visual, and also great emphasis on the kinesthetic. The stimulus for the beginning reader was a live puppy that some child was asked to bring to class the first week of school. The children played with the puppy, and their reading was based on their experience with the dog.

All the cues are in context, so no learning need be merely ritual or rote. Ex. The boy went to school on a b_____; not what is a word that begins with "b"? Another way in which the cue is made concrete in learning the primer, is the dressing of large cardboard dolls representing the main characters of the primer.

An attempt to make the cue meaningful in terms of the cultural background of the children from Puerto Rico was the hiring of an exchange teacher from Puerto Rico She works with the children part of each day. The children who have been "sitting it out" suddenly came to life and became spontaneous again. They use both Spanish and English in these classes.

PARTICIPATION

There is great emphasis on participation of all the children. In the beginning group, one-third at a time came up and traced the letter on the board while the others traced the letters on their desks. Each child had an opportunity to do both. Then, each practiced on paper several times. In the accellerated group, each child had an opportunity to introduce the book he had selected as extra reading, and read a portion of it before the class. In another class, all the children played a type of anagram game where each child had a group of single letters on his desk. Each tried to get the greatest number of words, which he copied into his notebook. The very immature were put into a small class of fifteen to ensure full participation of each child. Since there is great emphasis on the kinesthetic and concrete, the teacher can see at glance whether a child is participating overtly.

REINFORCEMENT

The obvious reinforcement of the advanced group is to be part of the enrichment group. This builds self esteem and raises aspiration level through achieving status with his peers, his teachers, and himself. The ability grouping permitted the teacher to teach at the level at which the child could achieve success easily. The evaluation, which will be completed this fall, will show the effect of this approach. In the individual testing of each child, the emphasis becomes the child, and the teacher is made aware of the areas which are strong and weak. As each child learns the skills, his self image changes. He sees himself as one who can learn. This enhances his feeling of adequacy.